

Neath and Tennant Canals Trust

Quarterly Newsletter No. 119



Canal Boat Trips start again at Easter

News.

Thomas Dadford

Boat trips will be restarting at Easter and hopefully the problems we have been having with the engine will have been sorted out. Members who have shown an interest in crewing the boat will be receiving their rota shortly.

Thanks.

Many thanks to Mr. and Mrs Page for their kind donation.

Web Site.

The Trust's web site continues to develop and thanks must go to Hywel Jenkins, our Publicity Officer, for the many hours he has spent recently submitting information and photographs to the site.

In the News.

The canal has featured quite a lot in the news over the past few weeks - The Neath Guardian reported on a new study to look at the possibility of regenerating the Milland Road area of Neath. " The study will cover the land between the River Neath and the railway from Sandvic Osprey up to the area surrounding Zoars Ark. It will look at the possibility of restoring the canal which runs through this site" The study is expected to be completed by the Autumn.

The Evening Post reported on the continuing vandalism on the canal at Resolven. The doors of the 'Enfys' have been ripped off twice and fire extinguishers have been sprayed inside the boat. Ty Banc Cottage has also been targeted. The West Glamorgan Rainbow Trust which runs Ty Banc and Enfys, says the repair bills are a massive drain on their resources.

Work Parties.

For details of work parties please contact the Work Party Co-ordinator - Malcolm Smith on 01792 774991



Questions and Answers

A number of members sent in answers to the questions asked in the December 2006 issue of the Newsletter.

Mark Whalley came up with these answers-

1. Q. Where does the word 'canal' come from?

A. I believe the word 'canal' comes from the Latin 'canalis' which translates as a tube or channel.

2. Q. Why were 'copper poles' carried on the canal?

A. I have absolutely no idea! I carry a wooden barge pole on my boat. It floats, is not too heavy, has a degree of flexibility and is useful for fending off. I have heard of some boat owners using aluminium poles with bungs on each end to prevent them from sinking. The only other type of copper pole I can think of would be those found on electrical contacts or for transporting red-heads from Poland!

3. Q. How was a loaded barge weighed?

A. A loaded barge would be weighed by means of gauging. This would be done by one (or more) canal companies to enable them to charge tolls for carrying cargoes on their canals. Tolls were levied for each mile travelled at a rate determined by the type of cargo being carried - typically, the higher the value of the cargo, the higher the toll charged. The process of gauging a boat would be performed in a special gauging dock, where the amount of freeboard of an empty vessel would be measured at four marked points on the boat. Then a measured load of 1/4, 1/2 or 1 ton would be added and the freeboard again noted. This would be repeated until the boat was almost at the point of sinking. The average of each of the measurements would then be recorded for that boat in a gauging book, copies of which would be sent to each toll office. Due to the non-uniqueness of boat names, many of the canal companies devised their own boat indexing system. For example the GUC Gauge No was that issued by the Grand Union Canal. When a boat subsequently passed a toll house, the toll keeper would use a gauging rod to measure the amount of freeboard at the four marked points. These four measurements would then be averaged and cross-referenced to the gauging book for that boat. This would enable the toll keeper to determine the tonnage of cargo and depending on the distance travelled and type of cargo, would levy the toll.

Our Chairman, Peter Ricketts submitted these answers -

1. Where does the word 'canal' come from? -- The derivation of the word I will leave to other members, who probably have a better knowledge of the English language.
2. Why were 'copper poles' carried on the canal? -- See the attached shipping note regarding the transportation of copper poles.

Note re- copper refining process. The final process in the refining of copper using the 'Welsh Process' was to remove the carbon in the copper so that the metal would be tough and malleable and suitable for rolling into the required thickness, this process involved the molten copper being 'poled'.

The surface of the copper was covered with a layer of charcoal or ground up anthracite and then stirred with 'green' wooden poles. The copper frothed and bubbled as gas, steam and brittle making carbons were given off. Properly poled copper had a smooth silvery sheen, but copper over poled became a tangle of long 'toffee-textured' strings.

3. How was a loaded barge weighed? -- The explanation given by Mark Whalley covers the subject fully, but I would like to add the following, which applied to local Welsh canals.

The boats used on the Neath and Tennant canals were of a standard construction, 60ft long with a 9ft beam and would have had very similar gauge details when initially launched. The canal companies required the owners to identify their boats by either a name or number and it was the responsibility of the carrier to declare the weight of his load. If the load was to be verified or suspected to be overweight to that declared the boat's freeboard would be measured using, in the case of the Neath Canal, a measuring rule calibrated in tons. (A Neath Canal barge would sink approx 7/8th of an inch for every ton loaded.)

At the North Road Lock, Cardiff, on the Glamorganshire Canal, a weighing machine was installed where boats were weighed empty for record purposes. If it was suspected that a boat had an overweight cargo it could be sent to the weighing machine, floated into a cradle, the water drained and the boat and load weighed and the weight of the load verified. This procedure with it's subsequent delays was enough to deter any dishonesty. Weighing machines were located on several other English canals, the Cardiff machine is now at the Waterways Museum at Stoke Bruerne.



NEATH CANAL COMPANY.

19 day of June 1882 SHIPPING NOTE, No. 10

Owner, William Jones Esqr

	Tons.	Cwt.
Goods. { <u>Copper Poles</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>10</u>

Loaded at Ynysybren Mile Post.

Discharged at Dylais Mile Post.

Distance .. 4 Miles.

Wm Daniel Boatman.

W H Morris Clerk.

A Shipping Note issued to record the carrying of $12\frac{1}{2}$ tons of copper poles on the Neath Canal between Ynysybren and Aberdulais on the 19th June 1882. The owner of the poles was William Jones and the canal boatman was Wm Daniel, the description of the items carried, owner etc, and it's weight was recorded by Wm H Morris the Neath Canal toll clerk based at Lock 3 at Clyne.

The poles were probably destined for one of the copper works located along the Tennant Canal at Red Jacket or Port Tennant, as the note only records the travel along the Neath Canal to Aberdulais where it then transferred to the Tennant Canal.

Copper poles were green wooden poles used to stir the molten copper in the final refining process, they were grown in the Neath Valley as a cash crop and were mainly of the fast growing alder.

Finally, Dave Coles from Resolven came up with these answers -

Q2 - Copper Poles - to 'cop' means to 'catch'. Bargees used these poles to catch or deflect over-hanging branches and other obstructions such as bridge parapets, passing boats etc. Such poles, about 10 ft. in length, were cut from local trees e.g. ash (hence the word 'coppiced') Shorter poles were also carried to refloat barges stuck in the mud. I think these poles were called 'pushers.'

Q3 - By the measurement of the freeboard, length of boat and carrying capacity etc. (Discovered by Archimedes.)

Thanks to all the members who submitted answers to last month's questions - it's a bit like 'Call My Bluff'!

This month's Question (sent in by Dave Coles)

Q - What volume of water is required to fill a one mile length of canal - 4 and a half feet deep by 12 feet wide? (Thomas Dadford accurately estimated this to within a few hundred gallons)



SYNOPSIS OF RESTORATION OF NEATH CANAL

STATE OF THE NEATH CANAL AS OF NOVEMBER 2005.

Navigation on the Neath Canal from Neath to Briton Ferry is severed by a low road bridge at Bridge Street, Neath and to reinstate navigation from Neath Town Centre to Briton Ferry will require a lift bridge at this location. Only weed cutting and a minimum of dredging has been carried out on this section of canal to maintain it as a water channel only.

The section of Neath Canal between Neath Town Centre and Tonna is navigable and on which the Neath & Tennant Canals Preservation Society (N&TCPS) operate a trip boat during the summer for public trips.

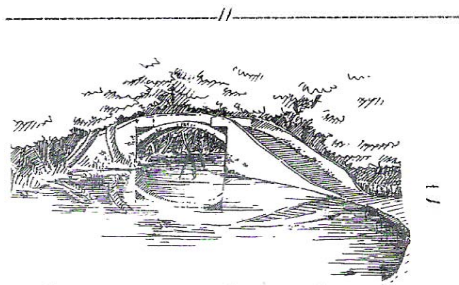
The section of canal between Tonna and Abergarwed was heavily polluted by minewater discharge. Remedial measures were taken to treat the discharge and were successful, which has recently allowed this section of canal to be dredged and cleaned out by Neath Canal Navigation Co.(NCN) under a £2.6m scheme funded by the WDA, B.P., and Objective I funding. Along this section of Neath Canal at Aberdulais is located the transfer basin at the junction of the Tennant Canal.

The canal between Abergarwed and Resolven is derelict and partially filled in and dry along the infilled section of canal. The canal is culverted and unnavigable at Resolven by the crossing of the canal line by Commercial Road and it's embankment.

Between Resolven and Ysgwrfa near Glynneath, the canal was restored by YTS and Manpower Services schemes during the period 1985-1990, this section contains seven restored locks, a restored aqueduct over the canal, a new canal aqueduct and several restored access bridges and is navigable along this length. This section of canal is used by the ENFYs Trust to operate a trip boat for the disabled. This section is also used by a number of canoe clubs and available for public boating subject to obtaining a license.

Ysgwrfa to Glynneath is derelict and waterless but the canal line is still intact except for a section now under the embankment of the now redundant Glynneath Bypass Road.

The Neath Canal Acts of 1791 and 1798 are still in being and protect the Neath Canal along it's line from Giants Grave to Glynneath.





NEATH CANAL: CURRENT RESTORATION PROJECTS.

As indicated above the 7km section of Neath Canal between Abergarwed and Tonna has been dredged and damaged walling, sluices and some bridges along this length have been restored and rebuilt, the work, apart from minor snagging issues, was completed December 2005.

The N&TCPS obtained funding of £250,000 through the sponsorship of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, CADW, NCN Co. and Objective I to restore Tyn-yr-heol Lock at Tonna. This project has now reached completion apart for some snagging work to be undertaken and was opened on January 26th by Val Lloyd, AM for Swansea East and Chair of the Member's All Party Group on Waterways at the National Assembly for Wales.

NCN have followed up on the £2.6m dredging scheme between Abergarwed and Tonna with a successful funding application to restore the structures associated with the restoration of navigation along this section. The £1.5m scheme funded through Neath Port Talbot Council and Objective I funding, covers the rebuilding of three locks (Lock Machin, Upper and Lower Clyne locks) between Aberdulais and Clyne and with some added assistance from the Environment Agency rebuild a navigable channel across the partially collapsed Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct. It is hoped the building of the navigable channel across the damaged Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct will be completed during 2006. Work is steadily progressing on the restoration of the three locks and together with the completed restoration of Tyn-yr-heol Lock approximately 9km of canal will become navigable in the very near future. i.e. from Neath Town Centre to Abergarwed.

The N&TCPS have also been successful in obtaining funding for two schemes, each of £50,000, from the Neath Port Talbot Community Rural Capital Key Fund to (i) carry out the refurbishment of Resolven lock gates and (ii) to carry out a Condition Survey and Works Appraisal on the section of the Neath Canal between Abergarwed and Glynneath. Work has already started on these two schemes and will be completed before 31st March 2006.

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TENNANT CANAL: PROPOSED RESTORATION.

The Tennant Canal Co. are seeking to restore the Aberdulais Aqueduct and lock which will re-establish the navigation link between the Neath and Tennant Canals. The restoration of Tyn-yr-heol lock by the N&TCPS will restore navigation to the transfer basin of the Tennant Canal at Aberdulais and when restoration work on the three locks and aqueduct north of Aberdulais is completed will add considerable credibility to the efforts now being undertaken by the Tennant Canal Co. to restore the aqueduct and lock at Aberdulais.

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POSTSCRIPT.

Completion of restoration of the upper sections of the Neath Canal, restoration of Aberdulais Aqueduct and lock and the little dredging required on the Tennant Canal to return it to a navigable standard will see the first section of the plan to link the Neath, Tennant and Swansea Canals through Swansea successfully completed.

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SOCIETY VOLUNTEER WORK PARTIES.

The N&TCPS has held volunteer work parties since it's formation in 1974, initially to clear vegetation from the structures and canal line to facilitate (i) a survey of the Neath Canal and (ii) to plan restoration work within the capability of Society members and (iii) to plan a campaign of restoration.

The physical work of restoration carried out by the Society has included:

Dredging and restoration of Aberdulais Basin at the junction of the Neath and Tennant Canals.

Dredging of the abandoned section of the Neath Canal between Resolven and Crugiau and the re establishing of the towpath line between Resolven and Ysgwrfa, involving the removal of a large number of mature trees and undergrowth and laying of an all weather walkway.

Dredging of the canal bed between Commercial Road, Resolven and Farmers Arms Lock and reinstatement of the towpath.

Rebuilding of walling along the canal line and bridge parapets.

The rebuilding of the carpenter's shop, forge and covered work area at the old Neath Canal Co. workshops at Tonna following the purchase of the freehold by the Society. The Society has operated a trip boat on the Neath Canal since 1990, located at Resolven, on the restored section of canal and since 2000 between the Neath Town Centre and Tonna, providing public access to this lower section of the Neath Canal

Campaigning by the Society in partnership with the old Neath Town Partnership resulted in the 5.6km length of canal between Resolven and Ysgwrfa being restored to navigation.

The Society obtained grant aid of £174,000 to carry out an environmental project at Tonna in 2001.

A £250,000 grant to restore Tyn-yr-heol Lock at Tonna in 2005.

Currently a £50,000 grant to carry out a condition survey and work appraisal of the Neath Canal between Abergarwed and Glynneath.

A further £50,000 to carry out a refurbishment of Resolven Lock.

The Society work very closely with the Neath and Tennant Canal owners especially the Neath Canal Navigation Co., and following the completion of the grant aided survey work, at present being undertaken by Atkins Consultants Ltd, will facilitate the process of seeking further funding to complete the restoration of the Neath Canal from Briton Ferry to Glynneath. — very exciting times ahead.

Peter Ricketts.
February 2006.

UPDATE OF CURRENT RESTORATION AS OF JANUARY 2007.

Tyn-yr-heol Lock.

The grant of £250,000 to restore Tyn-yr-heol Lock and Lock House has almost been totally spent on the restoration of the lock alone. The restoration of the external of the house was unable to be progressed at this time due to the escalating cost of civil engineering works during the time the grant was applied and the start of work.

Work of restoration of the lock by contractors, Dean & Dyball, has been completed apart from finalising the outstanding snagging. At this time, almost a year from the start of work, the lock is still not operational due to the gate manufacturer going into liquidation during fitting, resulting in the top gate and ground paddle not functioning to the standard specified before completion of the contract. All outstanding snagging and adjustments to the lock should be completed by the end of February enabling the lock to become fully operational.

Condition Survey.

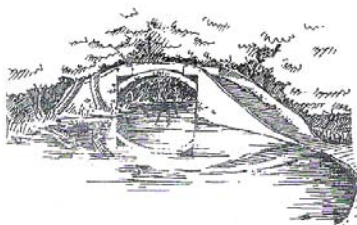
The £50,000 grant to the Trust from the NPTCBC's Capital Key Fund to carry out Investigative/Condition Surveys along the Neath Canal has been completed and is in the process of being used by the Neath Canal Navigation Co. to plan schemes and grant applications to further progress the restoration of the Neath Canal.

Resolven Lock.

A further grant of £50,000 from the Capital Key Fund was obtained by the Trust to replace the deteriorating lock gates at Resolven and carry out some remedial work to the lock. The Trust has worked with the Neath Canal Navigation Co. in preparing a contract specification and requested tenders from four gate manufacturers. Tenders will be opened in the third week of January and contracts placed for the work in February.

Tonna/Aberdulais Improvement.

The Trust and NCN have been invited by Groundwork Trust along with other interested bodies and landowners to submit schemes for the improvement of the heritage and environment of Tonna and Aberdulais, which includes the canal corridor through this area. This initiative follows on from the Tonna Area Local Interpretive Plan in which the Trust had a significant input. The budget for this project is at present set at £150,000 but if the schemes submitted are able to improve the visitor attraction to the area then additional funding could be found.



Aberdulais Aqueduct.

Following campaigning for the restoration of the Aberdulais Aqueduct both locally and of influential visitors to the All Party Waterway Group at the Welsh Assembly, a site meeting with CADW, EA, a representative of the Tennant Estate and the Trust was held at the site of the aqueduct to discuss the feasibility of restoration. The EA and CADW agreed to the exchange of information regarding the requirements flood relief and the implications likely to be encountered affecting the listed ancient monument. Further to the site meeting a meeting was held on December 5th 2006 at the NPTCBC Offices with representatives of CADW, EA, NPTCBC, NCN, DEIN and the Trust to discuss the course of further action to restore navigation across the aqueduct.

The Trust has been unsuccessful in making contact with Doug Williams of Leeder Management, who manage the Tennant Estate interests in this area, regarding the future actions required to progress the restoration of the aqueduct. A meeting to be held on Mon 22nd Jan to formulate an approach to continue the momentum of restoration of the aqueduct before any serious damage to the structure occurs. Trust, NCN and NPTCBC to be present.

Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct.

Neath Canal Navigation Co. is progressing with the proposed restoration of Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct, additional funding is now secure and tenders for the building of a new aqueduct will be sought in the very near future. When completed the new single span steel aqueduct will be the longest of it's type in the UK and will restore navigation from Neath Town Centre through 4 newly restored locks to Abergarwed, a distance of 9km.

January 2007. Neath Canal Navigation Co. is about to place the contract for building of the replacement Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct with Dawnus Construction following their submission of a successful tender.



The flood damaged aqueduct at Ynysbwlllog with the temporary footbridge



The Workshops at Tonna Lock



The Mudlarks at Tonna Workshops

Preface: A "Summer" or "Sumpter Horse" was the name given to the pack-horse, which carried goods of all kinds across Britain in by-gone days.

A Horse Called Summer

The pack-horse Summer sniffs the air and tests the fastness of her stable door.
She knows the winds of March will soon abate and catkins dance upon the warmer air,
For in the spring the pedlar sorts his wares to ply his trade and greet old friends
And like the swallow he arrives – another harbinger of spring.

His varied stock in panniers stowed he leads his mare into the lane so long awaited goods
Will reach the furthest cottage door. A clock, a book of verse, a lace-trimmed gown
He carries from a far off town and when they gain some market place
The patient Summer stands to gladly share the watering font that fills the moss-lined trough.

With pricked up ears she hears the whooping children come
With clattering boots and pennies hot in hand
To buy their black-tongued liquorice sticks,
A paper hat and tuppenny toys for some.

Farthing ribbons sell apace to lissom village maids,
Their bonnets to adorn. A signal to a likely lad
That she is ready to be wed and lie in Mother Nature's bed
For thus the perfumed petalled flowers the bumble-bees entice.

But older folk a kettle buy, a lacéd corselet, or farthing twists
Of dark brown shag to smoke in brittle white clay pipes
For as the rosebud fades to full blown flower, so fleeting youth departs
Our autumn days arrive our toil is o'er and we to the earth return.

He brings the parson holy books, new printed for his pew-filled flock,
But to the Squire a keg of brandy-wine, rowed silently with muffled oars
To sheltered coves on moonlit nights and sometimes, closely wrapped,
French novels for the lonely widow in the Grange.

At end of day they seek their rest
And sleep contented 'til the dawn
When crowing cocks arouse them from their beds
And Summer's led from stable door, the weighty panniers slung in place again.

They leave the town by well-worn tracks and slowly climb the distant hill
And from this height a village spire they see
As morning mist lifts from valley floor
And chimney smoke curls up from cottage thatch.

Then on the wind a clock tower chimes to count the passing of the hour
And so another day unwinds as pedlar and his mare plod slowly to the ford
Where Summer takes a well earned rest and drinks the cooling watery flow,
Where lazing trout in reedy margins hide.

David Coles
June 2006

Holsworthy to Bude continued;

Do ee remember where us was when I left ee last time?, Well we are well on our way on the canal up to Holsery, having just left Red Post. Jed and Henry are up ahead towing us along without any effort as once the boat gets going it takes little to pull it and all Jan Shaddick had to do was to steer. He hung on to a massive piece of wood which was on the end of his "tiller" he told me. I nodded cause I naved what a tiller was having lived beside the canal all me life. I longed to have a go at un though but did'n have the nerve to assen(sorry. that means, ask him).

Now us was lucky cos us had a bit of land that ran down to the bank of the canal and father kept a few chickens and ducks for eggs. Every now and then us would have one for dinner especially if ee didn look to healthy. Mother would never kill one that looked well cos er would be laying vore sure. How us didn catch chicken flu or get egg bound I'll never know.

Father used to grow some vegatables in the garden if only the rabbits would leave em alone. He could see the garden from the bedroom window and thats where he kept his 12 bore. So sometimes us would have rabbit pie for tea. Mother would make the best rabbit pie in Vealand. The kids would come from all over the place to try un out.

Best of all Father used to fatten up big sows and us had only just killed one last week. Mother,reluctantly asked Jan if her could cook the breakfast as twas about half past five. I say reluctantly cos if you saw the state of his oven and his pots and pans you might be a bit reluctant as well.

Jan was delighted. He could just stay where he was,with his tiller in his hand. Clouds of smoke poured out of his pipe from time to time and occasionally he would spit at a passing fly. Jan was in heaven.

Soon the lovely smells of mother cooking fresh bacon from our poor old sow wafted out of the galley. If we wadden feeling hungry before we were certainly feeling hungry now. She put dripping in the frying pan to cook it and the bacon had a thick slice of fat on the top which was always crisp. Put hairs on your chest Father would say and little Carol would cry and say she did'n want any. We would then have a thick slice of bread mother had made in the clome oven to mop up the plate and end with with porridge made with water. Then we always had to have some dreadful stuff on a spoon which was supposed to do something to us but I never discovered what until later in life.

Suddenly Jan shouted to Jed to stop. We slowly drifted into the bank and Jan made fast. He grabbed a bucket, jumped on the bank and shot off up across the field towards the cows under the trees near Anderton Farm. So we all got off and went for a walk going our separate ways,if you know what I mean. Ten minutes later Jan was back with a bucketful of milk which he poured into jugs and stored them below the waterline where they would keep cool.I never knew if Will Stacey who farmed Anderton was aware of what was happening but Jan always had plenty of milk.

Within minutes we all had a lovely hot cup of tea complete with creamy milk thanks to Will and his cows

We glided over the aqueduct at Burmsdon, it's not very long, only got one arch and on then into Devon over the River Tamar. The Tamar is the river that divides Devon from Cornwall. We came around a bend in the canal and there in front of us is Vealand Incline.

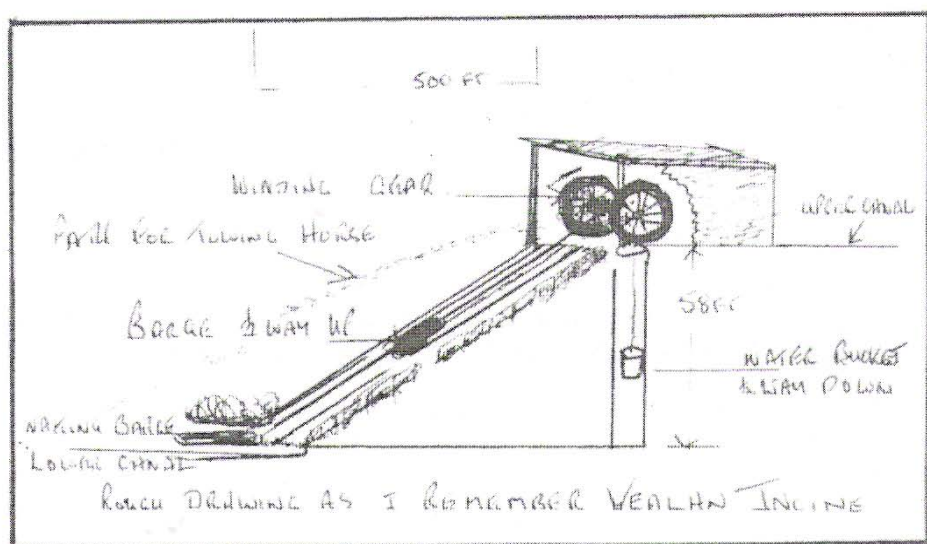
Good ole Jan has got us here early so that we can get hitched up straight away. The buckets are full of water up the top and we are ready to go.

Jed has stopped Henry and is rushing to untie the lead rope so that Jed can glide the barge into the incline to connect up the coupling.

Vealand Incline is about 500 feet long and takes us up 58 feet to the highest level of the canal.

And that's when I met Mrs. Aggie Yelland and er daughter Millie for the first time.

I'll tellee more about that again if you'm interested.



Your Council of Management 2006/2007.

Chairman: Peter Ricketts

Vice Chairman and Work Party Co-ordinator:
Malcolm Smith

General Secretary: Ian Milne

Treasurer: Gareth Hughes.

Membership Secretary: Trevor Morgan

Publicity Officer: Hywel Jenkins

Social Secretary: Vacant.

Other Directors:

Edwin Farrar
Veronica Warren
Ted Porter
Mike Jones

Articles, letters, photographs etc. are always needed to keep your newsletter interesting. All contributions should be sent to the Editor:

Ted Porter
35, Alexander Road,
Rhyddings,
NEATH,
SA10 8EF
email: edward.porter.eurfryn@ntlworld.com

Contributions should reach the editor by the first week of the month of publication i.e. March, June, September & December.